

The Bakersfield Californian

Where in Bakersfield do you want high speed rail to go?

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer

sshepard@bakersfield.com | Monday, Mar 23 2009 12:00 PM

IF YOU GO

The High Speed Rail meeting will be held from 3 to 7 p.m. Thursday at Rabobank Theater, 1001 Truxtun Ave.

Written comments on the project will also be accepted through April 10. Comments can be mailed to Ms. Carrie Pourvahidi, Deputy Director, ATTN. Merced to Bakersfield, California High-Speed Rail Authority, 925 L St., Suite 1425, Sacramento, CA, 95814, or sent by e-mail with subject line "Merced to Bakersfield HST" to comments@hsr.ca.gov.

The bond measure was passed.

The route has been sketched out.

Now it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty of planning for the state's high-speed rail system.

It starts in Bakersfield on Thursday with a meeting held by rail planners to provide information and collect input from the public on the portion of the system that will service Bakersfield.

"This is where people say, 'Oh, put it here, don't go past this corner or do this or that,'" said Quentin Kopp, chairman of the California High-Speed Rail Commission. "We want all of those suggestions. You also want people to ask questions."

The meeting is part of a process to create detailed reports for each segment of this system from San Francisco to Anaheim required by state and federal environmental laws. A similar report focused on the general alignment of the rail system has already been approved. These reports will focus on detailed analysis needed before construction can begin.

"The route has been identified but not with particularity," Kopp said. "It may turn out to be 50 feet one way, 50 feet another."

Planners will also be able to provide an update on the financial status of the project, as well as environmental effects and economic impacts.

Plans call for the 800-mile rail system to run from San Francisco, through the San Joaquin Valley to Los Angeles and then Anaheim. Valley stops are planned for Stockton, Modesto, Merced, Fresno, Bakersfield and a potential one in the Visalia-Tulare-Hanford area.

THE PROJECT

Costs: \$33 billion (in 2008 dollars) to construct the main line from San Francisco to Los Angeles and Anaheim.

Up to \$45 billion for full buildout, which includes extensions to San Diego and Sacramento.

The system is expected to cost \$1 billion per year to operate, which would be offset by fare revenue.

It will cost the state about \$19 billion to pay off Proposition 1A bonds over 30 years, with average annual payments of \$650 million.

Financing: Of the \$10 billion in Prop 1A bond sales, \$9 billion will be spent to build high-speed rail and about \$1 billion will be spent to improve existing rail systems that would connect to it.

Remaining funds to build the main line will come from the federal government and private investors.

Train fares are expected to pay for part or all of the system's operating costs.

Technology: Trains will be electrified with steel wheels and rails.

Trip times/fares (one-way):
Bakersfield to Los Angeles: 54 minutes, \$28. Bakersfield to San Francisco: 1 hour 51 minutes, \$43; Bakersfield to Fresno: 37 minutes, \$25.

Timeline: Some segments could be operating in six years. Full operation will likely take up to 10 years.

Economic benefits: Central Valley residents will save \$3 billion in direct costs by traveling on the high-speed train instead of by car or plane.

Several years ago, local leaders selected downtown Bakersfield as the location for the Bakersfield station.

State voters passed Proposition 1A in November, which approved \$10 billion in bond sales to start construction of what will be the largest public works project in state history.

Despite rumors, Kopp said there is no guarantee that tracks through the Central Valley will be the first constructed.

While the Central Valley will serve as the location for test tracks when the train travels at speeds of more than 200 mph, trains can go no faster than 125 mph in the Bay Area and from Los Angeles to Anaheim.

The High-Speed Rail Commission will meet soon to set criteria for which sections will be constructed and open for service first but Kopp said areas that can raise money through local funds and private-public partnerships will likely see service first.

“If a section can be fully paid for ... our law says give priority to any section that uses the least amount of bond proceeds,” he said.

